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Peter Krull, partner and director of sustainable investing at Earth Equity Advisors, says meeting two influential people in his life led him to a career in socially responsible investing.
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The Ladder: Peter Krull's Ph.D and SRI moments
By Rob Burgess
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Welcome to the latest installment of The Ladder, a series by Financial Planning that looks at how executives and leaders in the wealth management industry made it to where they are today — and what you can learn from them.

Today, Peter Krull is a partner and director of sustainable investing at Earth Equity Advisors. He lives in Asheville, North Carolina, in a solar-powered house and drives an electric vehicle. His book, "The Sustainable Investor," is scheduled to be released in 2025 by Wiley.

But a quarter century ago, he was living a very different life. He credits meeting two important people in his life with changing the entire trajectory of his career.

Krull began in financial services in 1998 working for Merrill Lynch.

The first turning point came when he met his future wife, Melissa Booth, a

scientist, science communicator and novelist, who holds doctorates in microbiology and molecular genetics.

"I like to joke that I married up, that's for sure," he said.

The second inflection point came when Krull spent an afternoon with Bill McDonough, one of the preeminent green architects in the world.

These conversations about sustainability and the environment led Krull to hang out his shingle in 2004, where he began practicing socially responsible investing (SRI). (At the end of 2022, Krull sold the firm to Prime Capital Investment Advisors, now Prime Capital Financial.)

Krull said meeting both his wife and McDonough were instances of being in the right place at the right time.

"Working at Merrill and working within the system just wasn't for me," he said.

He credits the pair with "having an impact on me and forcing me to ask the question that was outside of the typical sort of traditional investment paradigm.

"'How can you align your investments with your values?'" he said. "Melissa, asking the question from a scientific perspective, Bill asking it from more of a system perspective. And me going back to the drawing board and saying, 'Is there, is this an opportunity? Are there enough investment products out there to be sustainable or socially responsible? And can I make this fly?'"

Within a few months of those encounters, Krull said he had decided to break away.

"I haven't looked back," he said. "It's been the best decision that I've ever made from a business perspective."

Krull said they now market specifically to people who understand the importance of the work he's doing.

"If they are going to retire on their investments and send their kids off to college, they want to do it with money that they feel good about," he said.

The firm's business model is two-fold, Krull said. It's first and foremost an advisory firm, working with individual clients, trusts and institutions. The second is that it licenses out its portfolios to be used by other advisors. He said this second element is important because younger investors are more interested in sustainability in their portfolios.

"If you're an advisor and you're not taking sustainable investing seriously by at least having a solution for those folks, especially when we think about that money that's going to be passed down over the next decade or so from parents

and grandparents ... those clients are likely to move elsewhere," he said. "What we try to do is fill in that gap. I'll tell another advisor, 'You don't have to be the expert. Let me be the expert. You manage the relationship, and let us manage the sustainable investments for this next generation.'"